

Lyons Farm School House
Chancellor Avenue
Newark, Essex County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, A.T.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

Lyons Farm School House

Source of information - News Item, 1930

A tablet placed on this building by the Schoolmen's Club of Newark at the dedication exercises by the Board of Education on Nov. 3, 1924, summarizes the history of the landmark as follows:

"Two centuries ago on this spot the seed of Newark's educational system was planted. The parent school, built in 1728, and burned in 1782, was succeeded by this structure in 1784.

"Within these modest walls many of New Jersey's leaders received their early training.

"Before this door in 1797 George Washington paused to acknowledge the homage of the pupils.

"Its early mission completed, this schoolhouse stands a memorial of our forefathers' far-visioned creed that government by the people must be founded on education of the people."

The tablet was not quite accurate when it said that the early mission had been completed, for a short time after the dedication exercises the school was re-opened, in conjunction with a frame annex to provide quarters for special classes of tubercular children. Now that the up-to-date school for tubercular children, which is on Boylan Avenue, is ready for occupancy, the old stone school really has completed its early mission, 146 x years after it began.

Other highlights in the history of the edifice were emphasized by Raymond B. Gurley in the address that he delivered at the dedication exercises as president of the Schoolmen's Club. Mr. Gurley said in part:

"The old stone schoolhouse and the land adjacent to it has an interesting history. The site of the building and land was purchased from the Hackensack Indians for one-quarter pound of gunpowder, and 'forever dedicated to the establishment of a free school'. That was about 1726 when trading with the Indians was carried on by barter. In 1728 a frame building about the same size as the present building was built.

"A Mr. Ballamy was the teacher in 1776, and tradition tells us that General Washington, on his way to winter quarters at Morristown during the Revolu-

tionary War, stopped at this school house, and while standing on the stone steps in front of the door, addressed the pupils and praised them and the teacher in charge for their work.

"One of these stones has been placed before the door of the Old Stone Schoolhouse now, and I should love to imagine that this very stone is the one upon which General Washington stood on that memorable occasion. However, of that we cannot be certain.

"The old wooden schoolhouse was the headquarters of various public gatherings. When the call for troops to fight in the Revolution was made, the colony of New Jersey responded nobly, furnishing about 11,000 men. Of this number fully 5,000 men met and were mustered into service around this house.

"Although the war was really over when Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown in 1781, England was very loathe to give up her colonies. Many bands of Tories wandered about, doing damage whenever they had an opportunity.

"One of these bands from Staten Island, on a marauding tour, spied this wooden building one day in 1782, and thinking to deal the community a crushing blow, burned it to the ground. 'Tis said that before the ashes were cold plans were being considered for replacing it.

"They decided to replace it with stone and so the men, donating their time, went to the quarries along Chancellor Avenue, then called Potpie Lane, and digging the stones from the quarries built the present building. It was completed in the year 1784 and they signified the date by placing a weather vane upon its cupola bearing the date. This weather vane still turns with the varying winds.

"Mr. Joseph Lyons was installed as teacher in the new building. He was succeeded by Mr. Murray, who with his pupils in 1797 greeted General Washington on his way to Elizabeth. Prince Talleyrand, the French statesman, while an exile in America, visited the school in 1795."

NOTE

The above history is taken from "New Jersey Buildings and Biographical Sketches" collected and edited by Mrs. Walter W. Jackson, historian, of Rahway, New Jersey.

Revised 1936, H.C.F.